

# People & Places

## Family company changes with the times

R.M. Wade Co. evolves during 150 years of innovation

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

The R.M. Wade & Co. has long been venturing into new frontiers.

Founder Robert Marshall Wade was an Oregon Trail pioneer who began his career by peddling goods to gold miners out of a tent in California.

Wade's business evolved and relocated over time, eventually selling implements to farmers in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Since then, the company has continued to transform.

Now in its 150th year, the firm is still run by R.M. Wade's descendants, but its focus has shifted to distributing irrigation equipment in far-flung international markets.

"You have to reorganize it from time to time," said Edward H. Newbegin, great-grandson of R.M. Wade and president of the company, which now does business under the Wade Rain moniker.

When the company was founded in 1865, the U.S. was entering an era of revolutionary agricultural innovation.

R.M. Wade introduced Oregon farmers to many of these mechanized inventions, such as horse-driven seeders, reapers, manure spreaders, threshers and other implements.

The modernization trend continued under the leadership of Edward J. Newbegin, R.M. Wade's son-in-law, and later Wade Newbegin, the founder's grandson.

With the advent of portable fuel-powered engines, the company began to capitalize on machine-powered vehicles and implements.

R.M. Wade & Co. brought early tractor models, such as the Heider and Fordson, to Northwest growers who were able to afford improving on the efficiency of the draft



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Edward Newbegin, president of R.M. Wade & Co. and great-grandson of the company's founder, stands in front of some irrigation equipment that the company sells in international markets. The company has been operated by the same family for 150 years.

### Western Innovator R.M. Wade & Co.

Founded: 1865

Family ownership: Five generations

Headquarters: Tualatin, Ore.

Employees: 120

Annual sales: \$41 million

International subsidiaries: Mexico, Peru, Tanzania

Company history website: [www.rmwade150.com](http://www.rmwade150.com)



horse.

While such machinery certainly accelerated the effectiveness of American agriculture, it did not prevent the company from struggling through hard times.

A plunge in crop prices in the 1920s was followed by the Great Depression, leaving R.M. Wade & Co. with excess inventories as the demand for farm equipment contracted.

Wade Newbegin, by then running the company, was able to keep it alive by closing branches, slashing expenses and liquidating inventory — often at steep discounts — to generate cash.

"His purpose was to build the company, which he did a great job at," said Edward H. Newbegin, his son.

The company's fortunes improved and in 1936 the

firm began manufacturing irrigation equipment that would be sold under the Wade Rain brand.

Advances such as its "Powerroll" line of powered wheel-line sprinklers, developed in the 1950s, helped the irrigation unit gain prominence, and the company expanded into center pivot systems in the 1970s and drip systems in the 1980s.

Meanwhile, the firm continued to distribute tractors and implements from other manufacturers.

Wade Newbegin was always looking for new products to introduce but didn't market equipment until he was sure it was reliable, said Edward Newbegin. "He would very carefully test things."

The early 2000s brought major changes to the company.

Its manufacturing division was having trouble with profitability, so the company decided to sell the unit to another firm in 2002.

For succession planning purposes, the company's farm equipment distribution unit was divided from the irrigation unit in 2004, becoming a separate firm that eventually re-oriented into real estate investment.

Such splits become necessary when a family company grows to include many shareholders with different visions for its future, Newbegin said.

"The biggest tension is between reinvesting in the company and distributing the profits," he said.

Fortunately, the descendants of R.M. Wade were able to resolve the situation amicably, Newbegin said. "I think we had a strong ethic that family was more important than the business."

While the early 2000s brought some endings for the company, an important new venture was also launched.

In 2002, Newbegin's son, John, opened a subsidiary company in Mexico to sell irrigation equipment, which the company now sources from other manufacturers.

The operation flourished, growing to 15 branch locations, and now represents roughly 60 percent of the overall company's revenues.

The Mexican subsidiary's success prompted the company to increasingly focus on exports — similar subsidiaries were created in Peru in 2012 and in Tanzania this year.

Wade Rain has long sold products to overseas importers, but the subsidiaries allow the company to sell directly in those markets.

Newbegin characterizes the expansion into Tanzania as "a bit of a gamble" but he's willing to take the risk because it's a stable country with a need for irrigation.

"I think our timing is right in Tanzania," he said.

## FFA officers answer public's questions at Oregon State Fair

By JAN JACKSON  
For the Capital Press

SALEM — Ag youth at its best was on display opening day at the 150th annual Oregon State Fair.

While 4-H Club and FFA exhibitors worked with their animals in the stalls, pens and show rings, the 2015 FFA officers positioned themselves up front in an information booth and orchestrated much of the action.

They arrived before the fair started to help exhibitors move into the barns and they will stay after it's over to help exhibitors move out.

They were there to answer questions from the public and sent runners to the nearby FFA staff trailer if they didn't have the answer.

"Our focus this year is to help educate the public about FFA and its youth in the future of agriculture," Luis Mendoza, state FFA president, said. "We are doing a lot of that here in our information booth here in the barn. We are also getting some new chapters started like reopening one at McKay High School in Salem and a new one in Portland that is excited about developing a rooftop garden project."

Mendoza said about 330 exhibitors from the 35 to 40 FFA chapters are involved in the fair this year who are showing an average of two



Jan Jackson/For the Capital Press

From left, the 2015 Oregon State FFA officers are Bailey Myers, Nyssa, state sentinel; Addie Howell, Jefferson, vice president; Alysia Smith, Elton, treasurer; Joe Matteo, Sutherland, secretary; Ricky Molitor, Madras, reporter; and Luis Mendoza, Molalla, president. They are available at the Oregon State Fair, where they answer the public's questions about agriculture.

### For more information

Call 541-737-2395 or email [Emily@oregonffa.com](mailto:Emily@oregonffa.com).

to three animals each. In addition, 20 members are competing in tractor driving, 20 in livestock judging and another 10 in horse judging.

"These exhibitors are proud to show off their hard work on their projects and they love earning and taking home the champion ribbons to prove it," Emily Krazberger, associate director of

Oregon FFA programs, said. "We're all really proud of our state FFA officers for doing a great job of coordinating everything. They are extremely passionate about the future of agriculture and it shows in everything they do. They are doing a great job representing agriculture."

The National FFA Organization is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

## 'FFA Way' shows fair-goers what organization does

By CRAIG REED  
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — The "FFA Way" display at this year's Douglas County, Ore., Fair in early August was all about showing off the diversity of the program.

The display was fronted by three 12-by-12-foot landscape exhibits, created by teams of FFA students from Elkton, Oakland and Sutherland, Ore. Concrete blocks, stepping stones, plants, shrubs, trees, bark mulch, water and chairs were all used to create clean, outdoor settings.

Behind the landscape exhibits sat such items as a wood picnic table, Adirondack chairs, a 14-foot-long trailer and several tables with smaller items such as a boot jack, birdhouse, yard art, a pair of pliers and numerous other creations. To the left were wood and metal benches and several educational posters that gave information on such subjects as animal health, genetically modified organisms, cloning in agriculture and ticks and the diseases they are capable of spreading.

Ninety-five FFA members from five Douglas County schools — Days Creek, Elkton, Glide, Oakland and Sutherland — created the "FFA Way" display, using their developing metal and wood working skills and their agricultural

science knowledge.

Wes Crawford, the agricultural science teacher and FFA advisor at Sutherland High, described the FFA display as impressive, but also important because it showed the visiting public that unlike years ago, there is more to the program than livestock.

"The fair tradition provides a one-dimensional view of FFA — livestock," Crawford said. "This allows us to show all the different components in today's ag program."

FFA was founded in 1925, but over the last couple of decades, the program has diversified beyond animals. The changing times and interests in the food, fiber and natural resource industries — encompassing science, business, technology and production agriculture — were recognized in 1988 when the name was changed to National FFA Organization, and the program became known simply as FFA.

Michaela Black, a 17-year-old senior at Oakland High School, said the diversity that FFA offers provides an option for just about everybody.

"There are so many more paths to take now," she said.

She and Bryson Price, a 17-year-old senior at Sutherland High, spent time at the display, answering questions and visiting with people.

## Calendar

To submit an event go to the Community Events calendar on the home page of our website at [www.capitalpress.com](http://www.capitalpress.com) and click on "submit an event." Calendar items can also be mailed to Capital Press, 1400 Broadway St. NE, Salem, OR 97301.

**Through Monday, Sept. 7**  
Oregon State Fair, 10 a.m.-11 p.m. Oregon State Fairgrounds, Salem.

State Fairgrounds, Salem.

**Thursday, Sept. 10**  
Oregon State University Dairy Open House, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. OSU Dairy, Corvallis, Ore. The OSU Dairy has been converting to a grazing-based operation.

**Thursday-Friday, Sept. 17-18**  
California Poultry Federation Annual Meeting and Conference, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monterey Plaza Hotel, Monterey, Calif.

**Thursday-Sunday, Sept. 17-20**  
Mount Angel Oktoberfest, 11 a.m.-11:55 p.m., Mount Angel, 1-855-899-6338.

**Tuesday, Sept. 22**  
Small-Scale Equipment Field Day  
Noon-6 p.m. Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture, Corvallis, 541-766-3556. This event will allow participants to connect with multiple

toolmakers and suppliers, try tools out, see equipment in action, and ask questions.

**Saturday-Sunday, Oct. 3-4**  
Alpaca Harvest Fest, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, Sherwood, Ore., 503-628-2023. Two farms, one convenient location. If you're curious about starting a fiber farm or breeding fiber animals — sheep, goats, alpacas, llamas — we've raised them all and love to talk about them.

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